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FM AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4583  
INFO RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL PRIORITY 8078  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 7101  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 2688  
RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI PRIORITY 8711  
RUEHLH/AMCONSUL LAHORE PRIORITY 4636  
RUEHPW/AMCONSUL PESHAWAR PRIORITY 3305  
RUMICEA/USCENTCOM INTEL CEN MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RHMFIISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L ISLAMABAD 000326

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/22/2018

TAGS: PGOV PHUM PK PREL

SUBJECT: PAKISTAN: ALL GEO CHANNELS BACK ON THE AIR

REF: ISLAMABAD 5193

Classified By: Anne W. Patterson, Reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (U) After 78 days off the air, President Musharraf announced on January 20 that the GEO news and sports channels would resume broadcast immediately. These were the last two channels that remained blocked after access for many television channels was severed November 3 when Musharraf announced the state of emergency.

¶2. (U) Information Minister Memon told the press January 20 that GEO had been allowed back on the air because it finally signed the media code of conduct. GEO continues to insist that it has not signed the media code of conduct; however, it did succumb to government pressure and resume broadcasts without two of its most popular talk shows. Reportedly, the GOP objected that the hosts of these two shows were anti-government. During its suspension, GEO executives report that the network experienced a loss of 25 million USD. GEO executives had argued that the ban on its sports channel, in particular, was proof that the government was using economic retribution to force GEO to cooperate.

¶3. (C) Comment: The government's economic pressure appears to have succeeded, at least for now, in curbing anti-government commentary on GEO, but the good news is that Pakistanis again have access to all media channels - albeit with self-censorship - before the upcoming elections. Some have suggested that Musharraf resolved the GEO issue just before he left on a week-long tour of European capitals to avoid continuing criticism about media freedoms. End Comment.  
PATTERSON